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ABSTRACT

Fifty-four middle and lower class, black and white adolescents were observed interacting with their mothers during a discussion of seven child rearing problems. Maternal references to a range of disciplinary measures were identified, analyzed, and related to the subjects' scholastic performances. A factor analysis of process measures confirmed earlier findings based on self-report data concerning parental disciplinary style. Low socioeconomic status (SES) mothers who participated in an early age intervention and upper middle class mothers tended to be less punitive than those in the low SES untreated group. Black mothers were less permissive than those in the white group. Parental disciplinary style was found to be significantly related to school performance. Results are discussed in terms of: (1) the development of methodological procedures for interaction analysis in semistructured, ecological research and for the evaluation of process variables in early age intervention follow-ups; and (2) theory relating disciplinary style to intellectual development. Thirty references are listed. (Author/RH)

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Assessing Child Rearing Style in Ecological Settings: It's Relation to Culture, Social Class, Early Age Intervention and Scholastic Achievement

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Abstract

Middle and lower class, black and white adolescents were observed interacting with their mothers during a discussion of 7 childrearing problems. Maternal references to a range of disciplinary measures were identified, analyzed and related to the subjects' scholastic performances concurrently. A factor analysis of process measures confirmed earlier findings based on self-report data concerning parental disciplinary style. Low SES mothers that participated in an early age intervention and upper middle-class mothers tended to be less punitive than those in the low SES untreated group. Black mothers were less permissive than those in the white group. Parental disciplinary style was found to be significantly related to school performance. The results are discussed in terms of the development of methodological procedures for interaction analysis in semi-structured, ecological research, for the evaluation of process variables in early age intervention follow-ups and theory relating disciplinary style to intellectual development.

Assessing Child Rearing Style in Ecological Settings: An Exploration of It's Relation to Culture, Social Class, Early Age Intervention and Scholastic Achievement

After a generation of early childhood interventions, their subsequent evaluation remains somewhat inconclusive. Some reviewers of compensatory programs suggest that the slight advantage of conpensatory education participants over non-participants is not sustained and has probably been exaggerated by statistical procedures (Mullin & Summers, 1982). However, evaluations by the Consortium for Longitudinal studies (Lazar and Darlington, 1982) and the Government Accounting Office (Note 2) indicate that early interventions are cost-effective in terms of savings from retention and special education classes. It is unfortunate that often conclusions tend to be made prematurely on the basis of limited evaluation criteria particularly when it is not yet well understood how positive effects were brought about.

One area in the intervention literature to have been overlooked considerably is that of longitudinal effects on parents' disciplinary style. Although gains in scholastic achievement may be perceived by many as the most desirable, if not legitimate, outcome for evaluation, it may be rather sanguine to expect such effects without first considering the potential effect of intervention on children's environment. Childrearing practices represent one of many aspects in the home environment that may affect children's development (Baldwin, 1948; Hess and Shipman, 1968; Jordan, Radin

and Epstein, 1975; Sears, Maccoby and Levin, 1957; Zussman, 1978). The evaluation of intervention effects on disciplinary practices may provide us with a better understanding regarding differences in program effectiveness. For example, why do interventions appear to be beneficial to a limited number of participants? Are they the ones whose environment was affected most by the program? If so, can interventions be designed more effectively in the future? Such questions demand preliminary work in assessing familial processes. Unfortunately, both methodological and financial considerations appear to have deterred research progress.

Studies focusing on early intervention effects on observed parent-child behavior are practically non-existent. Yet, this is an area of both practical and theoretical importance in exploring the relationship between environmental change and social competence. The assessment of disciplinary style can provide an index of cohesion and adaptability mechanisms in the family (Adams & Gillota, 1983). Theoretically, parenting practices subsume a number of interrelated aspects such as warmth, acceptance, support, control and others that are relevant to the development of social competence (Baumrind, 1978; Adams, Jones, Schvaneveldt, & Jenson, 1982) and to "identity-achievement formation" for adolescents (Enright, Lapsley, Drivas, & Fehr, 1980). The link between parenting style and adolescent development would also appear relevant in the evaluation of early childhood interventions, independently of scholastic performance. It should be recognized that early age interventions

were primary prevention efforts designed to avoid many of the negative consequences of poverty. Prevention of delinquency, child abuse, mental dysfunction as well as school failure, represent legitimate targets of intervention programs. As such, it remains a scientific question to determine potential intervention effects on process-related outcomes, such as parental disciplinary style in context with other factors, such as scholastic achievement, social class and race. The present study explores some of these questions, in the context of methodological issues inherent in longitudinal, ecological research.

The issues addressed by the investigation stem from the follow-up of early age intervention, Project Know-How (Dunham, 1973; Note 1). Evaluation of early age intervention programs have noted a number of positive effects on children's development (Lazar, Hubbell, Murray, Rosche, and Royce, 1977; Lazar and Darlington, 1982). However, little is known with regard to the nature and persistence of intervention effects on family processes and the extent to which cultural background influences parental discipline and response to treatment. The present study provides an in-depth description of the assessment of parental discipline following an intensive intervention. The intervention sought to maximize the development of disadvantaged two and three year-old children through direct language and cognitive stimulation and a training program for the mother during 1968-1969. It employed mothers (after training in child development skills) in attempting to maximize the effects

of treatment long after the program ended. The study examines the extent to childrearing practices may have been affected as a result of intervention with mothers in a two year training program and the relation between childrearing style and children's scholastic achievement.

Methodological and Conceptual Issues

One dimension of the home environment to have received considerable research attention is parental disciplinary style. Although it has been examined mainly through self-report measures, disciplinary style has been found to correlate with a number of characteristics in children's psychosocial development (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, 1950; Baldwin, 1948; Bayley, 1964; Bing, 1963; Gordon, 1979; Sears, Maccoby and Levin, 1957;). The relationship between authoritarian practices in the home and children's cognitive performance, however, has remained equivocal in interpretation (Drews and Teahan, 1957, Baldwin, Kalhorn and Breese, 1945). Social class differences in disciplinary style, however, have been found consistently in the literature (Hoffman, 1960; Maccoby and Gibbs, 1954; Sears et al., 1957). In examining ideological values across social class groups, for example, Jordan (1970) found a higher degree of permissiveness with increasing SES levels of parents. A current view is that too much or too little parental control may interfere with children's pattern of social interaction, which in turn, may affect their development (Baumrind, 1966, 1978). This is an area that relates, in a yet undetermined fashion, to children's

development of cognitive and social competencies.

A major drawback of this literature concerns possible distortion introduced by self-report methods that are commonly employed (Mednick and Shaffer, 1963; Petersen & Migliorino, 1967; Taylor 1961; Zunich, 1962). The assessment of family interaction in ecological studies has proven to be also difficult, especially when the focus is on assessing qualitative aspects of behavior. Some studies focus on meaningful phenomena often that are encountered infrequently and are subject to low reliabilities. One goal of of the present study was to examine the extent to which maternal disciplinary style can be assessed in an unobtrusive manner during the course of semi-structured parent-child interactions. It should be noted that many of the measures employed in human interaction analysis involve judgments about communication processes with small samples and low base rates. However, researchers who study ecological processes have not avoided totally the challenge inherent in assessing complex, human interactions. Measures with reliabilities around the 70% level of inter-rater agreement are not uncommon (Brownstein-Burrows, 1981; Schachter et al., 1974; White, 1972).

Childrearing characteristics is an area that has been researched extensively in the literature, and in which, group differences have been documented through self-report instruments. Consequently, we have an opportunity and a frame of reference to begin to explore the construct validity associated with more naturalistic forms of

assessing of parental behavior. The trade-off between the self-report method, which elicits responses on a uniform basis (and thus allows for higher base rates and reliabilities) and the ecological approach remains an empirical question with regard to reliability and validity (Rosenthal, 1973). Observational methods, while producing generally less reliable measures, may equal, if not exceed the validity associated with self-report assessments of chilrearing. Yet, if both methods were to yield similar results, such cross-validation would tend to increase our confidence in assessing parental disciplinary behavior.

The study focuses on observed mother-child discussions that contain references to parental disciplinary practices. The observed communication is based on dyadic responses to hypothetical problem situations similar to some used in self-report questionnaires (Jackson, 1956). The study explores the question of whether the general configuration derived from the data is consistent with the literature in this area. In effect, does the disciplinary behavior of mothers range along dimensions identified previously in the literature? (i.e., autonomy/control, warmth/hostility, Schaefer, 1959; Kagan & Moss, 1962). Secondly, Are there group differences in disciplinary practices and are they consistent with research in this area? Does an intensive, multi-faceted intervention influence the way parents discipline their children? And finally, what is the relation between the present index of disciplinary style and scholastic performance?

Method

Selection procedures and description of subjects appear elsewhere (Portes, Dunham, & Williams, 1984). For purposes of this report, the following summary is provided. The present sample consists of 19 mother-child dyads that participated in an early age intervention program in 1968-1969, and 18 low SES and 17 middle SES control dyads that were identified using Hollingshead & Redlich's (1958) criteria at that time. The program attempted to maximize the development of children by direct stimulation procedures (e.g., the Palmer method, Note 3), language development as well as by parental education and support services for two years, 4 hours a day, five days a week. Parents were trained and encouraged to employ verbal reasoning and praise rather tna imperative and physical means with their children in the mothers' program component of the intervention. Although random assignment was employed in the intervention design initially, the follow-up's selection method consisted of tracing as many of the families in the initial sample as possible. All families contacted agreed to participate in the study. Attrition across groups was even at around 40% with nineteen of thirty experimental, eighteen of thirty low SES controls and seventeen of thirty middle SES control families having been located. There are twenty-five male and twenty-nine female children in the sample although there is a larger male to female ratio in the experimental group, twelve males, seven females, than in the other two control groups. About 60% of the families are still intact in

the two low SES groups. The middle SES group has a slightly but not significant higher proportion of intact families. The mothers' ages range from 31 to 45 years of age. Each of the groups include approximately equal numbers of black and white families. The children's ages were between 12 and 13 years of age at the time of the study. The follow-up sample (n=54) was not found to differ from the original sample (n=81), in terms of parental education and the father's occupational level using mean Hollingshead Social Index Scale values in the two low income groups.

Procedure

The 54 dyads were located using the telephone directory, the city directory and school records. They were reached by telephone and asked to participate in the study. Two low SES families were visited directly because they did not have a telephone. Several measures were obtained from a semi-structured interview with the mother and child. The interviews were conducted in the families' homes by the experimenter and an assistant. The following instructions were read to the mother and child by a white, female experimenter in order to avoid response bias due to differences in reading level:

> Mrs. _____ and _____, I'm going to show you some cards and read them to you. On these cards are some problem situations that could occur in your family. I would like one of you to tell the other how you would solve the problem, and then the other person tell how they would solve the problem. When you have both given

your solutions, I would like you to discuss the problem together and decide on a solution that both of you agree on. I would like you to try to speak to each other and to try to ignore us. Do you have any questions?

The experimenter answered any questions that were asked. The situations presented described common events appropriate for the child's age group. They were designed to elicit discussions of responses to potentially conflict-provoking but common adolescent, parent-child problems. For example, they were asked to discuss what would most likely occur if the child got into a fight at school or came home with poor grades. Seven 5 x 8 cards, each containing one hypothetical problem, were given to the mother and child, one at a time. The experimenter read the card out loud while the dyad read their card. The experimenter tape-recorded the discussion. The interview lasted, on the average, about half an hour. The experimenter kept silent unless the mother or child asked a question, to obtain clarification on particular statements or to elicit a response when a subject did not respond according to instructions.

The present measures are based on an instrument developed by Jackson (1956). Jackson's instrument assesses the parent's disciplinary style and consists of a tally of references made by the mother or child concerning different childrearing methods employed in the home. References to the following behaviors by the dyad were scored from the taped mother-child interactions.

a) accepts the child's behavior; is trusting

b) explains, discusses and provides rationales

c) refers to the use of natural consequences (e.g., not being able to go to a friend's house if absent from school)

d) bribes, rewards to obtain compliance

e) reprimands, scolds, berates, loses temper

f) asserts authority, orders, demands

g) threatens deprivation, restrictions, love-withdrawal

h) actually deprives, restricts

i) coerces to repeat behavior, induces guilt, shames

j) punished in ways not otherwise specified

k) physical punished, spanks, slaps

x) adds information, elaborates about similar situations

z) avoids considering the situation altogether, denies the possibility of the situation arising, is ambiguous in responding

The reliabilities for the Jackson measures was calculated by dividing the number of inter-rater agreements by the number of agreements and disagreements. Two trained judges, working together, examined each interaction and identified maternal statements that were scorable under Jackson scale categories. After a training period, a second group of raters examined the interactions of a subset of eighteen families that were representative of the whole sample in terms of experimental condition and race. Their scoring was independent of that of the first group of judges. Several

measures had low reliabilities due, in part, to very low base rates (e.g., response frequencies of 1 or 2) in the subsample used for estimation of reliability. A detailed analysis of rater judgments in the two groups was conducted by the authors. It revealed that the first group of raters was considerably more accurate than the one examining the subset. Hence, it was decided to include all 13 response categories in subsequent analyses. The average reliability for the Jackson categories was .77. Reliabilities for the measures ranged from .60 to 1.0 with base rates greater than one.

Results

A factor analysis of the Jackson measures was conducted in order to reduce the data and test the hypothesis that one factor would theoretically represent a lenient to harsh dimension of parental disciplinary behavior, as suggested in the literature. Variables A to Z were entered into the analysis using Rao's canonical factoring method. This method serves to find a solution were the relationship between the hypothesized factor(s) and the set of variables is maximized. In the present case, the hypothesized factor is considered to be a function of the linear combination of the observed measures' common variance. Also, Rao's method helps to find population parameters based on the correlations from a sample of cases. One factor (Jackson) was specified a priori to test Jackson's lenient-to harsh model of parental disciplinary practices. It had an eigenvalue of 2.80, thus accounting for over 20% of the variance in the present tests. Table 1 shows the factor pattern matrix.

Insert Table 1 Here

As this table shows, the Jackson factor reflects a parenting style continuum extending from lenient to harsh discipline methods. Mothers acceptance of children's behavior (A), use of natural consequences (C), addition or elaboration of information (X) and use of rewards to obtain compliance (D) are all measures that reflect lenient maternal behaviors and have high loadings. Contrariwise, references involving assertion of authority, deprivation, physical and other forms of punishment reflect the punitive end of the continuum.

Factors scores were derived for each case and analyzed in the second part of the study. A condition by race analysis of variance was used to assess the effects of early intervention, social class and race on disciplinary behavior (F=4.0, p .004). Sex differences were examined and not found to be statistically significant (t 1). Figure 1 shows the means of the Jackson factor's scores by experimental condition and race.

Insert Figure 1 Here

The ANOVA resulted in a strong race effect (F=12.6, p 001) but only a marginal condition effect (F=2.0, p .14). The condition by race interaction effect was not significant. The results indicate

that white mothers (x = .40, sd=.85) employ more lenient disciplinary measures than black mothers (x = -.36, sd=.72). Although group membership (i.e., treated or untreated low SES and middle SES) did not appear to affect significantly parental disciplinary behavior, mothers in the low SES treated group (x = .18, sd=.80) were considerably less harsh than mothers in the treated low SES group (x = -.31, sd=.81) and similar to middle SES mothers (x = .11, sd=.95) in Jackson factor scores. Condition and race accounted for 25% of the variance in the Jackson measure of parental disciplinary behavior. Finally, the relation between the present measure of parental disciplinary style and the adolescent's scholastic performance was examined. Table 3 shows Pearson correlations between disciplinary style and subtests of the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) and associated significance levels. As can be noted, all of the pairwise correlations were significant except for math, the only subject where race differences were minimal. Early intervention did not affect school performance significantly whereas SES differences were found to be reliable on all subtests. The general pattern of modest correlations in Table 3 suggests that parenting style represents a significant, yet small, component of family influence on individual development.

Insert Table 2 Here

Discussion

The childrearing dimension of the home environment is important to the understanding of influences on children's development. As Feshbach (1973) notes, "parental influences on the cognitive development of the child are not limited to cognitive training situations but encompass the full spectrum of parent-child interactions." Parental authoritarianism, overcontrol and/or punitiveness may reduce the number and quality of social interactions children need to develop intellectually and emotionally. This would seem to relate more directly to the development of social competence, in general, than of scholastic ability per se. From a verbal regulation theory (Vygotsky, 1962) standpoint, differences in disciplinary style may affect the type and amount of verbal information and language usage the child is exposed to, something which may influence the child's development of cognitive, verbal and social skills. It is interesting to note that the highest correlation found in Table 3 concerned the language subtest of the CTBS. From a functional perspective, parenting style may be found to be important to human development to the extent that it serves to mediate the quality and quantity of information and information-processing skills the child is exposed to in the home. This view offers perhaps a more parsimonious and explicit explanation than those suggested by earlier perspectives based on constructs like Democratic, Authoritarian, Erratic, and measured at the nominal level.

Relatively few studies involving intellectual performance have examined the relation between parental disciplinary style and cultural differences from an ecological perspective. Most of the data is related to social class differences within which cultural differences may be found. The present results suggest that culture plays a major role in the way children are reared. Caucasian parents are consistently less strict in disciplining their children than black parents, regardless of changes due to socio-economic-educational attainment or intervention. At least two explanations for this finding appear plausible. One is to dismiss it because of several sources of potential bias (e.g., experimenter bias, low base rates, etc.) The other concerns a cultural adaptation hypothesis in a historically prejudiced, oppressing society. It may be that black families place a greater emphasis on controling the child's public behavior than white families. Black children may encounter more strict discipline at home because their parents value "being good" and polite more than whites, whose public behavior is oriented otherwise. The meaning of what discipline should accomplish may very well be different across the two cultural groups and influenced, indirectly by history.

The present method of assessing disciplinary style provides a meaningful configuration of childrearing practices. Ecological studies often are subject to an overwhelming number of phenomena that are multidimensional in nature. The present research illustrates a way to quantify several aspects in family environment

from observed parent-child communication and appears sound in spite of a number of limitations relating to low base rates and small sample size. The results are consistent with the literature on disciplinary style in the home and on group differences in this area (Bronstein-Burrows, 1981; Kagan and Moss, 1962; Schaefer, 1959). The present measure of childrearing style is unidimensional and interval in scale, something that permits accurate differentiation between and within groups. The above serves as a first step in establishing construct validity for disciplinary style(s). The effect of early intervention on parental childrearing methods was found to be intermediary, suggesting that family-oriented early-age intervention may have lasting effects on the family when larger samples are used. It may be that a significant intervention effect on childrearing practices may not have been achieved for a sufficient proportion of families to be reflected on the average with the present sample characteristics. Group differences in childrearing style merit further attention, particularly when they are related, both in empirical and theoretical terms, to children's intellectual and emotional growth. More ecological research is urged that relates disciplinary patterns to children's social and intellectual development with populations that differ in history.

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TABLE 1

Factor (Pattern) Loadings ~~and Reliabilities~~ For the Jackson measure of Parental Disciplinary Style

Test		Factor Loading
A	Acceptance	.87
B	Explanation	.23
C	Natural Consequences	.45
D	Bribery	.29
E	Scolding	- .12
F	Assertion of Authority	- .59
G	Restriction Threat	.13
H	Deprivation	- .42
I	Induction of Guilt	.13
J	Other Forms of Punishment	- .31
K	Physical Punishment	- .34
X	Elaboration of Information	.35
Z	Avoidance, denial	.20

FIGURE 1

Means for the Jackson Disciplinary Style Factor Scores by Condition and Race

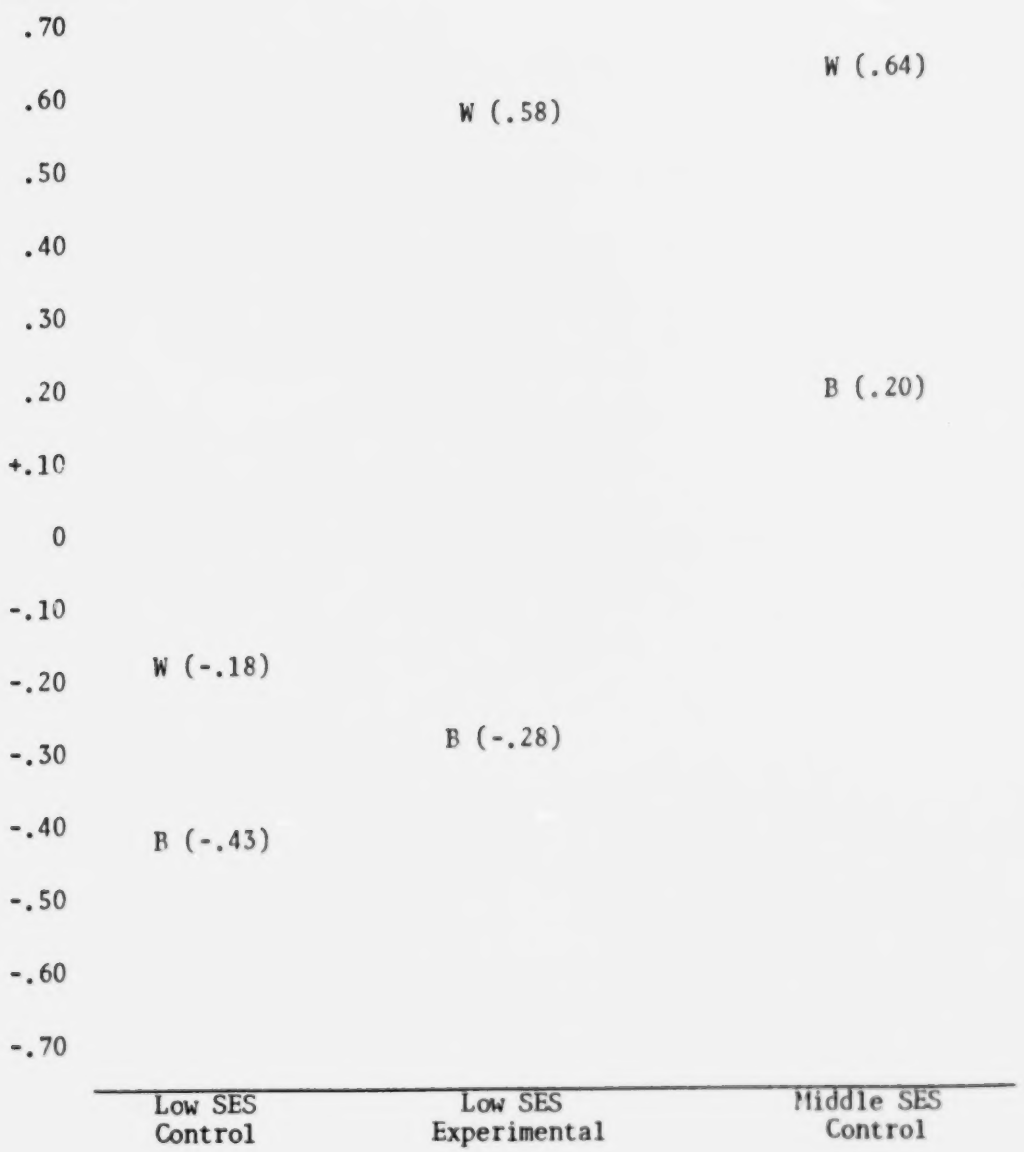

TABLE 2

Correlations Between Parental Disciplinary Style and Student Scholastic Performance (CTBS)

	Battery Total	Reading	Language	Math	Reference Skills
Disciplinary Style (Jackson Factor)	.29	.30	.35	.18	.23
Significance Level	(.01)	(.01)	(.005)	(.09)	(.04)